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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0211  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0225  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0296  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DILI 000200

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON DILI SECURITY SITUATION: RETURN TO NORMAL IS SLOW AND UNCERTAIN

REF: DILI 194

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¶1. Dili remains abnormally quiet following Friday's rioting and the security operations in response. It appears that the armed forces (FDTL) have relinquished law enforcement responsibilities to the national police (PNTL), but they remain involved in patrolling. Currently, there are five confirmed deaths and around 60 confirmed injured. Rumors that FDTL killed an additional 30 to 60 people continue to circulate, although these rumors are as yet unsubstantiated. Both the UN Human Rights Unit and the Provedor's (ombudsmen) office were yesterday granted access to detainees, all of whom were reportedly released today. Although there have been no significant disturbances or security operations in over 24 hours, many Dili residents remain tense. The number of people taking refuge in facilities in the city appears to have fallen, but some people departed the city during the day, primarily due to uncertainty and generalized fears rather than to specific threats. End summary.

Dili remains abnormally quiet

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¶2. Although normal activity continues in many areas of Dili, the city overall is far less populated and busy than normal. There has been a moderate increase in the number of commercial establishments open for business, and street markets in relatively unaffected areas are operating normally though at noticeably lower volume. However, the two major markets remain closed. Taibesi market in the southeast of the city is almost all rubble (resulting from separate incidents earlier last week) with no commercial activity. Comoro market in western Dili is intact, but only a few desultory vendors are open for business. There were some signs of people going about their normal daily business in Tasitolu, where the majority of the rioting damage took place, but all the usual roadside stalls remain empty.

FDTL out of the law enforcement business?

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¶3. According to FDTL leadership, the police have been fully in charge of law enforcement since yesterday afternoon. The FDTL has set up five observation posts in the city's outskirts manned with soldiers ready to intervene "if needed". In addition, military personnel (said to be military police) are carrying out

joint patrols with the PNTL, but the Government's position is that such patrols are normal military police activities and that the military police function will be limited to law enforcement with respect to members of the military. Embassy personnel observed during the day that the FDTL indeed no longer seemed to be carrying out any routine policing functions. However, there was an overnight report from an Embassy employee with a relative among the dismissed soldiers that active-duty FDTL came to his home several times during the evening and harassed and threatened his family. Another Embassy employee who has never been an FDTL member reports that four FDTL members went to his home on two separate occasions during the last 48 hours looking for him. While these activities may or may not have been officially sanctioned, the continued harassment of dismissed soldiers' families --- and apparently of other citizens as well --- is among the factors causing continued fear and tension among the population of Dili.

Updated casualty information

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¶ 14. The information on casualties available from the National Hospital remains unchanged from yesterday: doctors at the hospital report approximately 60 injuries, 15 from gunshots, with two dead and one in critical condition. A clinic located much nearer to the problem areas than the hospital reported that, contrary to expectations, they had not seen any patients resulting from the weekend violence. Meanwhile, the Government has updated its official number of deaths to a total of five and an Embassy source confirmed that there are five bodies in the morgue.

¶ 15. The rumor that many more people --- perhaps 30 to 60 --- had been killed in Tasitolu during the military operations there Friday night and Saturday morning (see reftel) has persisted. However, so far it has not been substantiated. Reliable Embassy sources who have been speaking to people from Tasitolu stated that they have not been able to substantiate the rumors. Both

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the UN Human Rights Unit and the Provedor's office today sent teams to investigate these rumors in Tasitolu, and especially to interview members of the community who might have witnessed such extrajudicial killings. So far, neither have reported finding any supporting evidence. However, a source in the Human Rights Unit noted that they when they spoke to detainees last night, it was in crowded conditions where the detainees may have felt unable to speak freely. Those who believe the rumor emphasize that FDTL refused to allow President Gusmao access to the FDTL compound in Tasitolu when he arrived unannounced on Saturday.

¶ 16. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Eric John and Ambassador Rees met today with Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak, Commander of the FDTL, who has resumed command after returning on Saturday from an overseas trip. General Matan Ruak said it is uncertain how many people have been killed, stating that the number might be seven or eight rather than five, but said he was confident that FDTL had not killed large numbers of people and secretly buried the bodies. He said the Government has appointed a commission, including highly respected Minister of Labor Arsenio Bano, to investigate these allegations. Matan Ruak also pointed out that on previous occasions when the Government had sought to involve FDTL in law enforcement activities he had declined to do so, although he would not say whether he would have refused the Prime Minister's order to activate the FDTL if he had been in Dili on Friday. Matan Ruak implicitly acknowledged that activation of FDTL without the consent of the President might have violated East Timor's Constitution, but he suggested that the city might have been destroyed if FDTL had not been activated after the police had proved unwilling or unable to put down the riot.

Detainees reportedly released

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¶ 17. The UN Human Rights Unit and the Provedor's office both

reported that they had last night been able to access detainees arrested during the weekend, including members of the group of dismissed soldiers. The latest information from the Human Rights Unit obtained at end of day was that a total of 115 individuals had been detained since Friday afternoon. Of those, 18 were dismissed soldiers / petitioners. The Human Rights Unit was able to conduct complete interviews with approximately 75 detainees yesterday, including some of the dismissed soldiers, and planned to continue with the rest today. However, almost all the detained ex-soldiers, and perhaps other detainees as well, were reportedly released today, either by the courts or at the prosecutor's discretion. We do not yet have information on whether charges will be pressed against any of them. The only ones remaining apparently are 13 of the dismissed soldiers who are not in formal police custody but reportedly preferred to remain at the detention facility until they could arrange transport out of Dili.

Thousands of displaced persons still in Dili and environs

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¶ 18. The internal displacement situation remains fluid and hard to quantify, but it appears that there are likely at least 10,000 within Dili overall. The largest gathering of displaced persons within Dili is still at the Catholic Church's Don Bosco compound in the Comoro area on the western end of the city. Earlier in the day, an international doctor visiting the compound reported that many people were beginning to depart, apparently to return to their homes. However, when Emboff spoke to the priest in charge late in the afternoon, he reported that about 5,000 people remained and that he expected that many more might return as night fell. Additionally, the FDTL (armed forces) sites are said to be hosting a combined number of about 1,200. Beyond these sites, there are several other areas where groups of dozens or hundreds of people have taken refuge.

¶ 19. Beyond those that have taken refuge within Dili, it is clear that a large number have left the city, although numbers are difficult to estimate. In addition, Embassy staff observed that people were continuing to pack and leave throughout the day. In explaining why they were leaving now when things seemed to be calming down, several departing residents stated that although they had no specific threat information, they are concerned about the continued state of uncertainty and have yet to receive sufficient information to increase their confidence in the situation.

REES